

## Delhi, Louisiana

### Delhi – Richland Parish Community Profile

Delhi is located in Richland Parish in northeast Louisiana in a region called the Mississippi River Delta.

Although Richland Parish is steeped in agrarian history and agriculture continues to be important, the non-farming private sector economy of Richland Parish is driven by manufacturing, retail trade, and services. In 1998 there were an estimated 6,750 full-time and part-time employees in the parish, with approximately 42 percent in services, 21 percent in retail, and 13 percent in manufacturing. The comparison to Louisiana is shown in the following table:

Employees	Richland Parish	Louisiana
Services	42%	36%
Retail Trade	21%	22%
Manuf'ing	13%	12%

There were 431 establishments in Richland Parish in 1997, with 37 percent in services, 23 percent in retail trade, and four percent in manufacturing. None of the establishments employed more than 500 persons, and 90 percent of the establishments employed fewer than 20 persons.

Estab'ments	Richland Parish	Louisiana
Services	37%	37%
Retail Trade	23%	24%
Manuf'ing	4%	4%

In 1998, the population of Richland Parish was estimated at 21,040 with about 32 percent employed full-time or part-time. Population decreased approximately 2 percent between 1988 and 1998. In

1999, the population was estimated to be 61 percent white and 39 percent black.

The unemployment rate averaged 8.0 percent in 1999, compared to 5.1 percent for the state as a whole.

Educational attainment in Richland Parish, for persons 25 years and over in 1990, was 31 percent for high school graduates (compared to 40 percent for the state) and 6 percent for college graduates (compared to 9 percent for the state).

Per capita income for Richland Parish was \$10,415 in 1988 (\$13,113 for the state) and \$15,940 in 1998 (\$22,206 for the state).

### The Louisiana Workshop

The TEAM Delta workshop, held in West Monroe, Louisiana, on June 8, 2000, offered information about how to create more local wealth and higher-paying jobs and about the new technology-based economy. Participants identified issues facing Madison, Ouachita, and Richland, parishes, including:

- Education & training;
- Financing;
- Cooperation, community spirit, and vision; and
- Loss of population.

Participants in the workshop also identified obstacles and opportunities.

#### Obstacles

Major obstacles appear to be:

- Workforce (lack of technically capable workforce, training opportunities, and work ethic, and the out-migration of skilled employees)
- Lack of access to financial capital
- Lack of social capital (social contacts, cooperation, & spirit)

- Lack of vision (thinking outside the box, positive attitude, and not being resistant to change.

#### Opportunities

Major opportunities include:

- **Workforce** (the opportunity to train and more fully utilize existing people and better utilize area technical colleges & the university to provide academic & technical skills)
- **Quality of life** built around a good location, small town atmosphere, and emerging community leadership;
- **Available resources** (including transportation infrastructure, utilities, natural resources); and
- **New opportunities**, including Internet marketing that provides the opportunity to compete globally, value-added exporting, improvements in education, and technology

#### Workshop Evaluation

The written evaluation of the workshop showed that of the topics covered in the workshop, those ranked highly useful were:

- Value added;
- The role of technology; and
- Social capital.

The topics rated least useful were clusters & networks and traded sectors.

The evaluation also sought to determine the extent to which attendees had been involved in planning and plan implementation in their communities. Results showed that there has been very little action planning by seminar participants. By far the most planning was in the area of K-12 education, followed by tech-focused training, and focused recruitment. Research parks and angel investor networks have received the least attention.

# The Community Technology Assessment

## The Delhi Community

Technology Assessment was held September 7, 2000. Eleven community residents participated. The session began with introductions followed by the TEAM Delta facilitator asking three questions concerning their attitudes about different kinds of investments.

The first question asked participants to assume that they had \$100,000 to spend on the following three things: (a) recruiting businesses to the community, (b) assisting existing business to expand, and (c) helping new, start-up businesses. The \$100,000 could be divided among the three things in any proportion desired. The Delhi participants would invest 37 percent in existing businesses, 37 percent in new businesses, and 27 percent for recruiting.

The second question asked participants to assume that they had \$100,000 to spend on the following three things: (a) education, training, and human resource development, (b) technology transfer and development, and (c) capital investments. The \$100,000 could be divided among the three things in any proportion desired. The participants would invest roughly equal amounts in each of the three areas, with 35 percent in workforce & education, 33 percent in capital investment, and 32 percent in technology.

The third question was whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the Internet was changing everything. Responses were about evenly divided, with six responding "yes" and five responding "no." Several of the participants responding in the negative acknowledge that the Internet has an impact; they simply don't believe it is having a large impact. "It is not being used as extensively as would be necessary to impact 'all things' or 'everything.'" However, other participants strongly believe that the Internet influences the way companies and individuals gather information and conduct business and that influence will continue to increase.

These warm-up questions were followed by discussion and

compiling four lists of technology resources.

Discussion about key firms -- those adding value, exporting, and paying higher wages -- led to the following list: Tifton Aluminum, Easy Way, Delta Phone, Duracraft, Dumas Candy, Dawson Farms, Southern Produce, Louisiana Uniforms, UPS Shipping Center, and a clothing distribution center.

Discussion about business partners that contribute to the success of key firms generated the following list: Riverwood in Monroe (boxes) and box board manufacturers in Monroe; small, independent, local pallet companies; legal, accounting, computer services -- Rayville; Bayou Internet; local utilities -- LA Gas, BellSouth, Entergy, and City of Delhi (water, sewer).

The discussion quickly became focused on soft infrastructure. There was extensive discussion of problems with K-12 education and how that affects businesses keeping and recruiting good employees, as well as residents wanting to stay. Participants agreed that the poor public school system is driving people to other towns -- "till we can fix the schools, we're going to have a hard time."

Other problems and gaps identified include too few activities and groups to develop community social capital, including:

- No event, place, or organization where everyone in the community gets together (used to be the schools, but schools are in bad shape).
  - No volunteer network
  - No job service or training; must go to Tallulah or Winnsboro for technical college
  - No local leadership programs
  - No chamber of commerce (which often spearheads leadership programs for youth)
  - No local newspaper; so little consistent news getting around, and there's no easy way for businesses to advertise locally. Community paper is done by high school students.
  - FFA is almost non-existent in the parish
- Delhi does have a civic center, a public country club with a golf course,

and the Northeast Livestock Show. Also, the local hospital seems fairly progressive, having organized a network of 8 north Louisiana hospitals that have combined purchasing and are looking at other things to do together. The hospital would also like to do more preventative health care, which would be an asset (as is the hospital) to a developing destination resort and possibly a retirement community at the nearby Poverty Point Reservoir.

## • Implementation Opportunities

Participants identified a number of areas for implementation or more detailed planning, including:

- Improve the public schools. This is a difficult problem throughout the country and has no easy solutions. It is clear that the local school board continues to work to improve the schools.
- Market the area as a top-notch, rural location for retirees and others to live, as a result of the Poverty Point Reservoir project being developed as a destination resort, the relatively large, progressive community hospital, and the location between and with easy access to Monroe and Vicksburg.
- Improve access to high speed telecommunications technologies to benefit existing businesses and because residents and retirees considering moving to the area because of the new reservoir development will require such access.
- Create a chamber of commerce or other economic development organization to focus on economic development (including development opportunities as a result of the reservoir), as well as addressing gaps in soft infrastructure (e.g., leadership programs, volunteerism) and hard infrastructure, specifically telecommunications.

*Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of the Census, & the Louisiana Department of Labor*

